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The Retreat — Context and Response

Manhattan, Kansas/Manhattan, New York

Shannon Criss

Critic: Kevin Kieran

The notion of “getting away from it all” has existed in the human race for generations, from Emperor Hadrian to King Henry the XIV, to Jefferson and Ronald Reagan. But not all are able to have their own villa to escape to, away from the daily confusion. The program for this project is based on the contemporary belief that people want to get away and strengthen their intellectual, spiritual, and physical well-being. Consequently, the philosophy of the retreat complex has undergone changes to include a library, a chapel, and a gymnasium. This project addresses this unique program and couples it with a comparison/contrast study of two radically opposed locations: the first in rural Manhattan, Kansas, and the second in downtown Manhattan, New York.

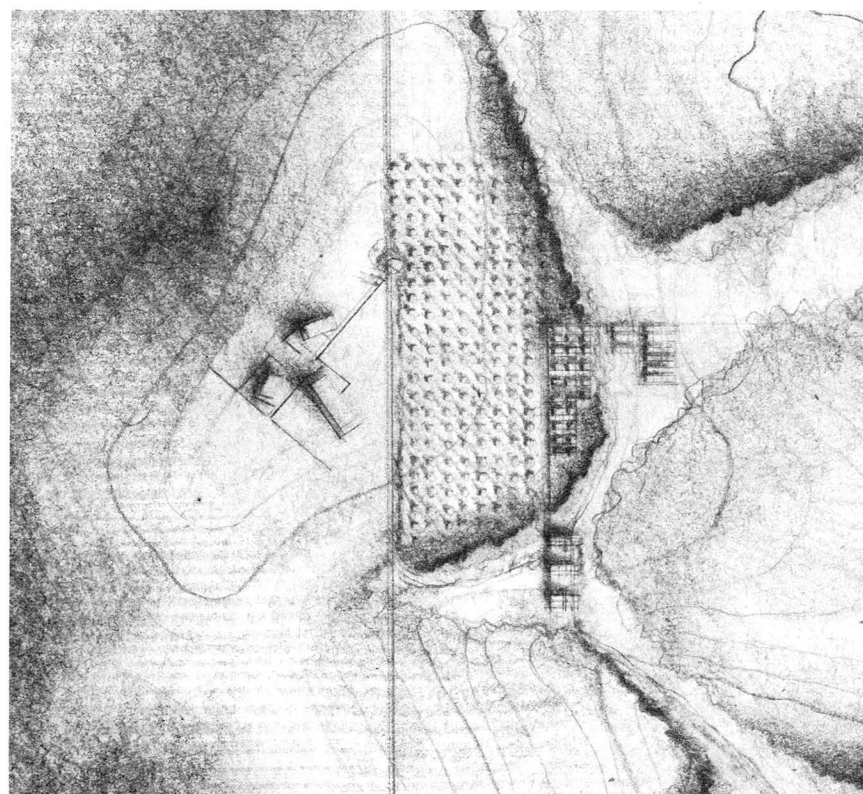
Kansas

The Kansas retreat is situated upon a crest of the rolling Flint Hills, rising from the broad flatlands. The crown of the hill remains in its original profile while the farmlands below stretch out in an ordered man-made grid pattern, distinguished only by the various crops. Hence, the project’s concept — the dichotomy of the synthetic grid versus the organic natural form. The functional requirements of the program — the stables, dining hall, housing, and offices — are plugged into the ordered framework, while the library, chapel, and gymnasium respond to

the landscape and take advantage of an array of panoramas across the prairies below.

At the base of the hill are the remains of a four foot stone fence which has stood firm since the 1850’s. The fence has been incorporated into the entrance procession and is considered ‘sacred.’ Crossing the creek on horseback, the visitor ascends the hill and follows the subtle contours which bring him to the gateway of the retreat. A tower articulates the entry and is integrated into the stables; this acknowledges that the guest has arrived at his destination. The first courtyard is just beyond the gateway. There lies the welcome hall and the point of orientation in the scheme. Continuing along the same path and through the second courtyard, the visitor encounters the only building that allows a daily meeting of all the company, the dining hall. A tree-lined path ultimately directs each guest to a personal housing unit.

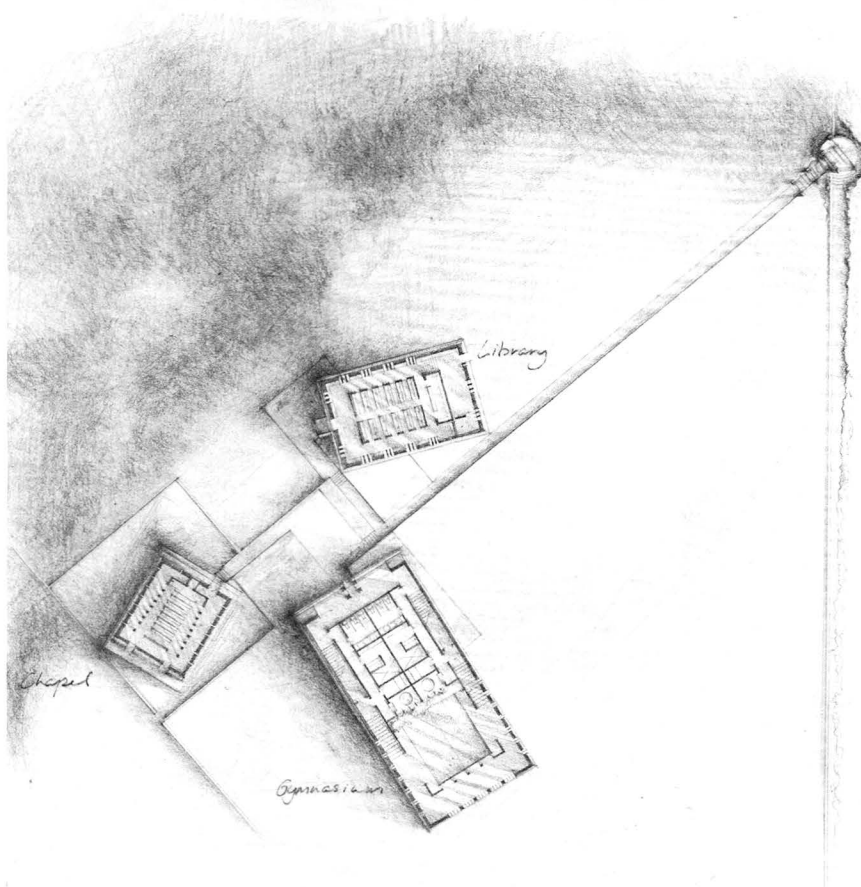
The housing area, for both residents and visitors, is orthogonally ordered and exists with a periphery of shoulder-high bushes which segregate the units from the natural landscape. The intent of the single unit concept was to offer each guest the maximum advantage of the dramatic site and to allow for private reflection. Each individual unit has a wall-enclosed garden incorporated for special care by the guest.



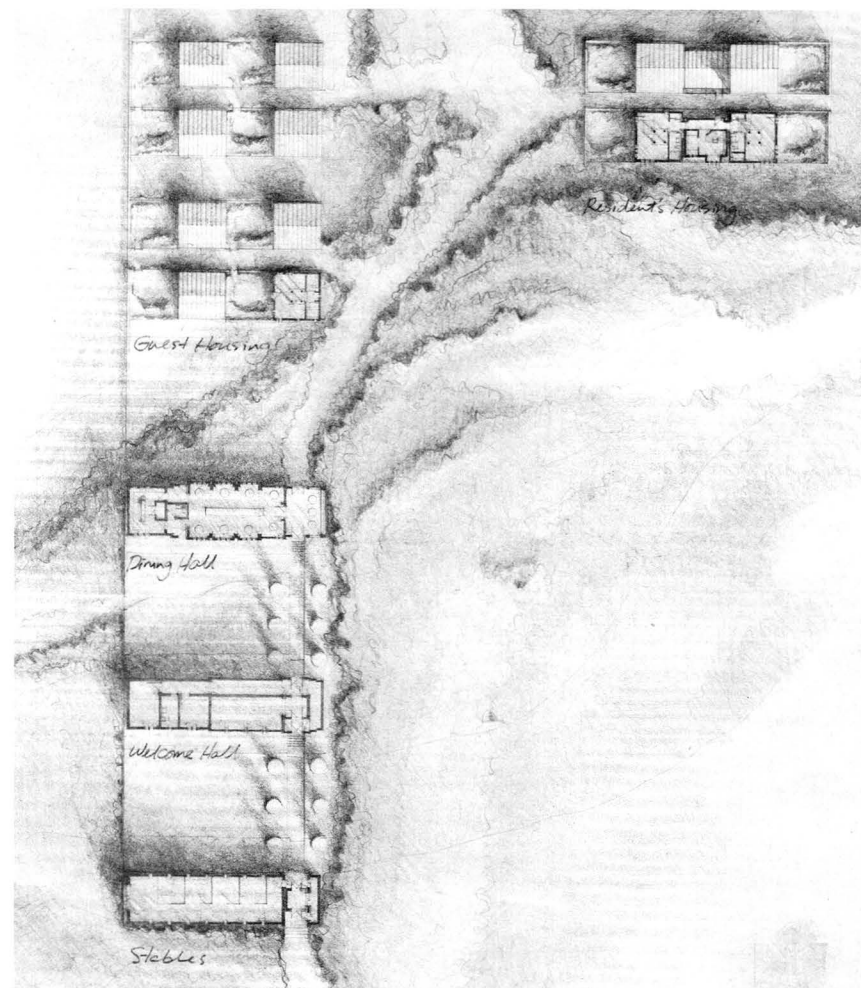
Site

The gymnasium, library, and chapel become ‘temples’ in this scheme and make reference to the Athenian Acropolis. The transition between community space and the ‘temple’ area allows a ceremonial approach to occur, and the point of initiation is the embrasure in the ‘sacred’ wall. Thus, the acropolis becomes a set piece, independently comprehended, and isolated from the complex by the wall to emphasize its importance for those who have elected to retreat into their own personal study.

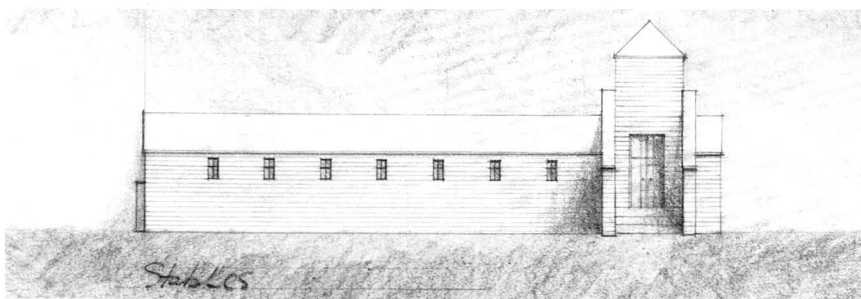
The exterior forms of the ‘temples’ are reminiscent of the shell-like character associated with ruins, yet are reconstructed with the typical regional material, the white Kansas clapboard. The tripartite construction includes a stepped base, columnar windows, and a capping pediment (the pitched roof of the interior building).



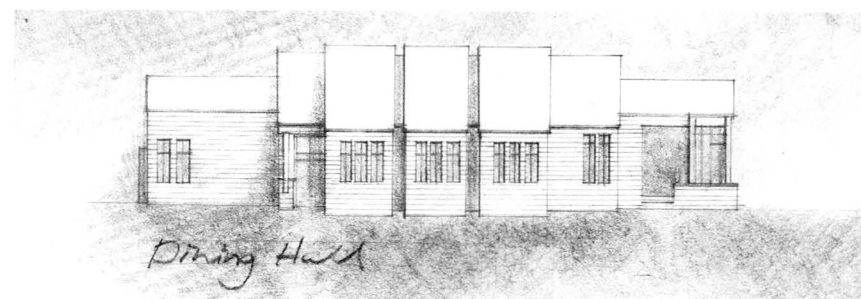
Chapel, Gym, Library Plans



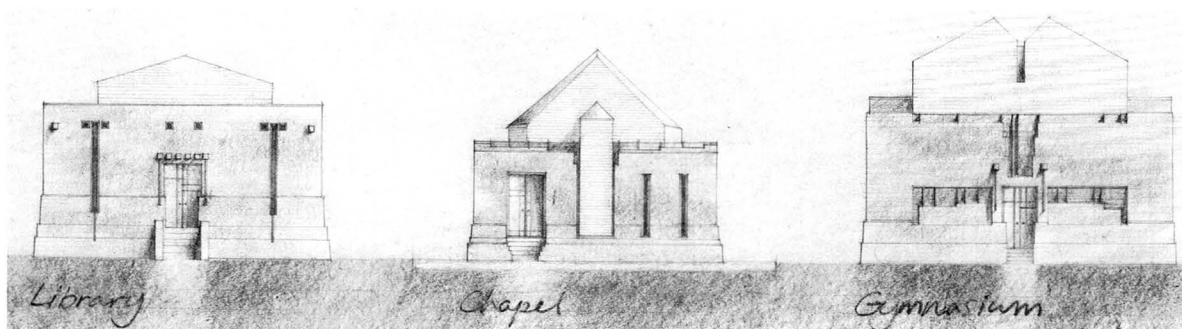
Dining, Resident Housing, Stable Plans



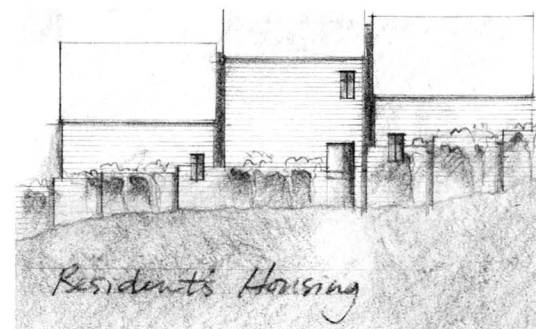
Stable



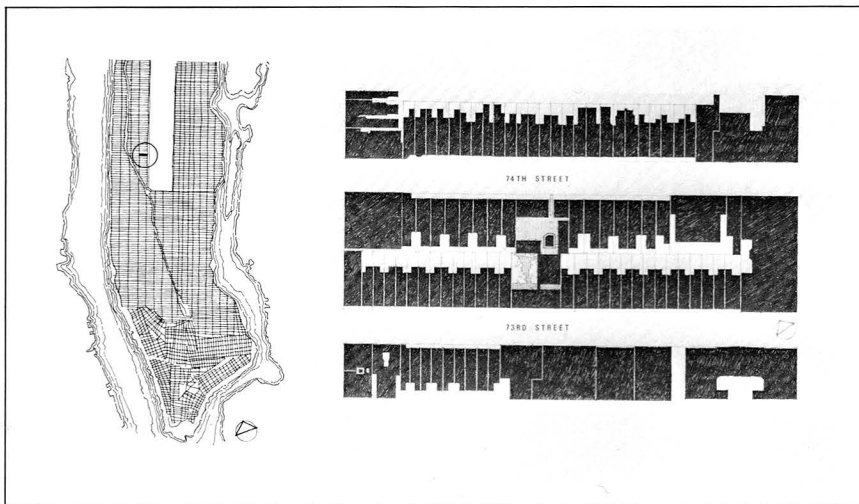
Dining Hall



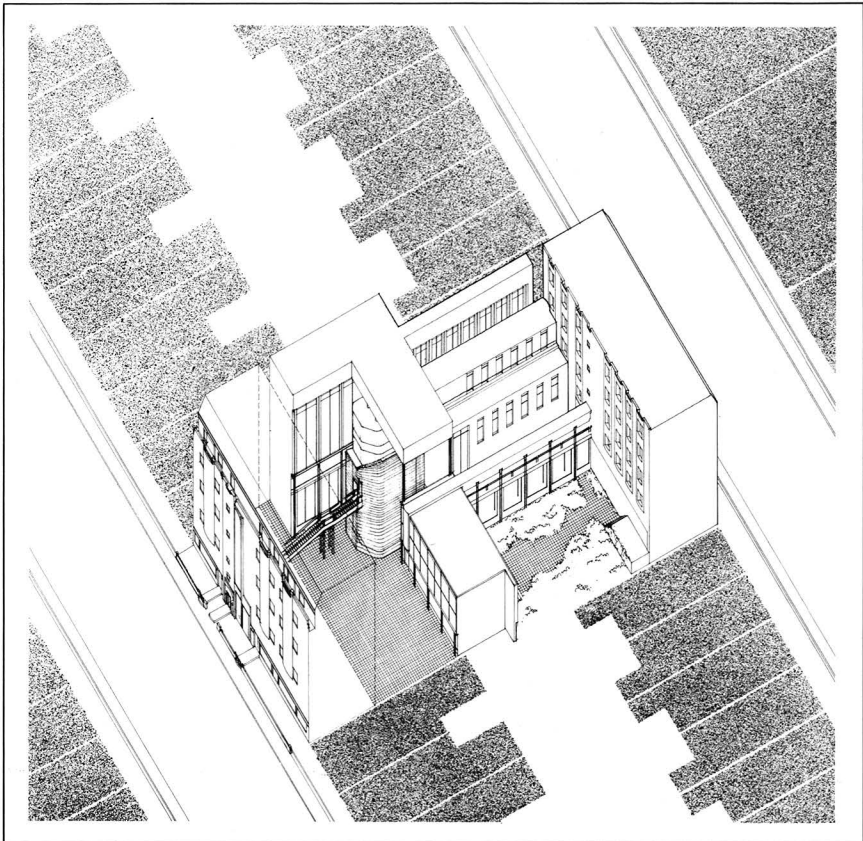
Library, Chapel, and Gym



Resident Housing



Plan



Axonometric View

New York

The New York site is placed within an eight lot section between 73rd and 74th Street, approximately two blocks from Central Park. The 20,000 square foot site is within a five story residential area where the two end blocks of guest houses and housing units work in harmony with the established pattern of the city while holding the retreat activities inside. The elements within the scheme are the common ground for the guests and residents. The ground plane has been maintained in its original state to establish a datum which has been mimicked in the cornice treatment as well; therefore, a unified whole is achieved while the facades can still portray their individuality. The housing is constructed of heavy masonry (a mass) while the activities between are treated with transparent glazing (a void). Thus, the exterior walls protect

the retreat much like a geode protects its inner crystalline core.

74th Street was selected as the major face due to its architectural integrity and the delicate use of both materials and detailing. The procession of entry begins at street level. The visitor is confronted by a short tunnel which becomes a slow rising stair ascending through the lower levels, up through a massive floor slab, and into a granite covered courtyard. This space was created to augment and magnify the feeling of detachment from the city. A thick handcarved wooden door invites the guest into the welcome hall where a counselor and an orientation session follows. The visitor is then directed to a living unit located on the same level. The dining hall, planted gardens, and an assortment of lounge areas placed throughout the complex are available for guest use on a daily basis. The library and exercise room

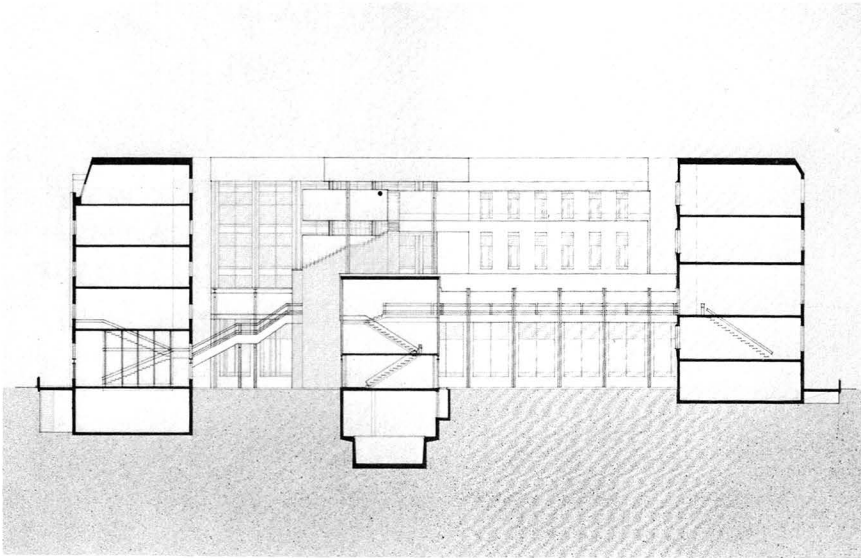
are located along the eastern edge of the scheme while the chapel and the welcome hall read as one unified element set rigidly into the orthogonally ordered framework. The meditation cells are rhythmically linked to this element in spinal fashion and incorporate the same warm materials, yet are set apart from the retreat by juxtaposition and overall form. Direct and indirect daylighting, fresh air, window seating, and balconies create special places throughout the complex.

Summary

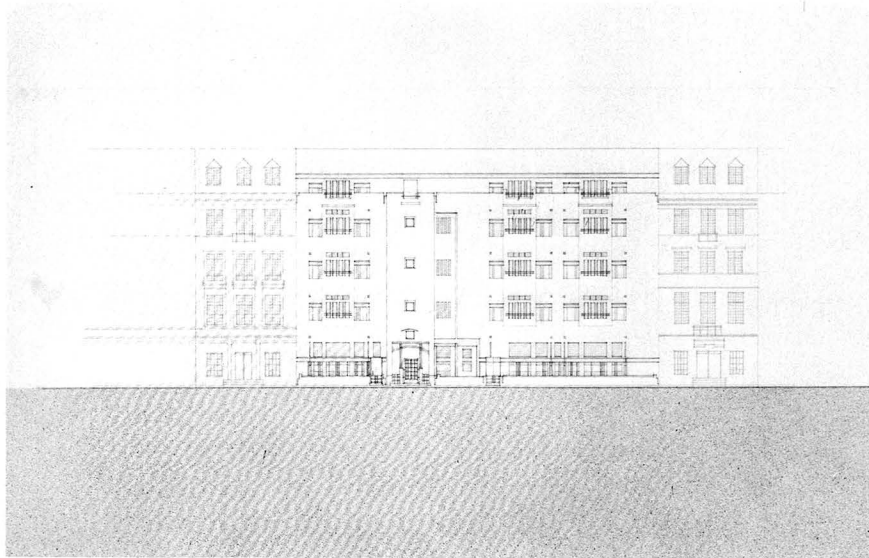
Although the two solutions to the program have completely different conclusions, due to context and location, the process of design has remained identical. To reason with context, location, topography, and literally all the site perplexities is but the first step in the complete design methodology.

Plan Key

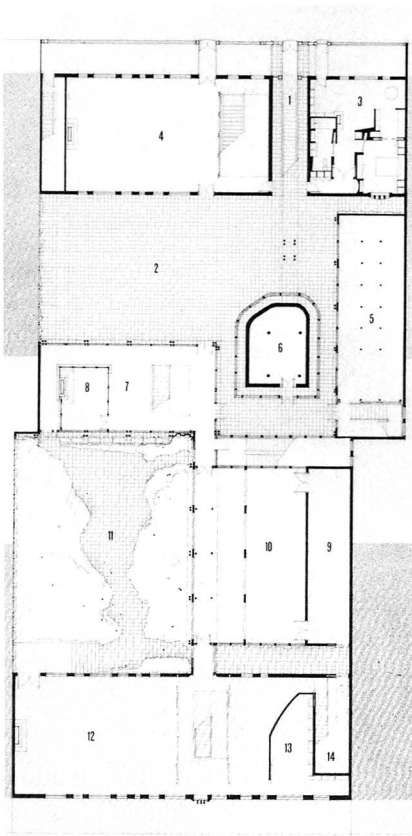
1. Entrance Stair
2. Entrance Courtyard
3. Double Apartment
4. Resident's Lounge
5. Library Reading Room
6. Counseling Conference Room
7. Meeting Room
8. Counselor's Office
9. Kitchen
10. Dining
11. Garden Courtyard
12. Visitor's Lounge
13. Conservatory
14. Service/Storage
15. Floor Lounge
16. Single Apartment
17. Welcome Hall
18. Library Reading Room Below
19. Common Lounge
20. Kitchen Below
21. Dining Below
22. Ramped Access to Visitor's Block
23. Shower Room
24. Balcony
25. Welcome Hall Below
26. Library Stacks
27. Common Lounge Below
28. Exercise Room
29. Chapel
30. Library Stacks
31. Private Meditation



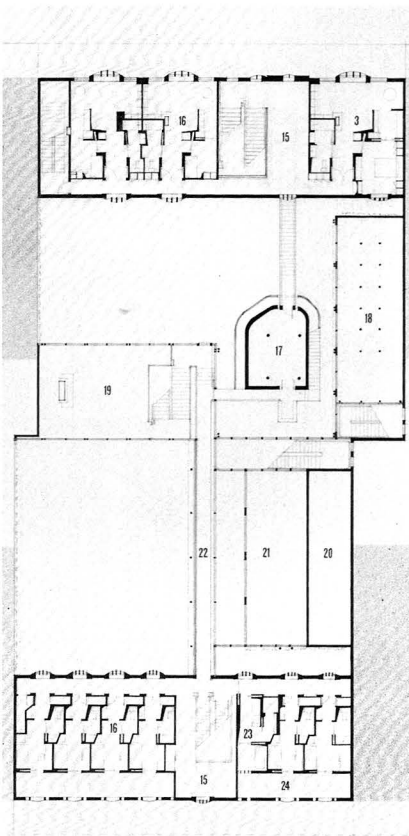
Section



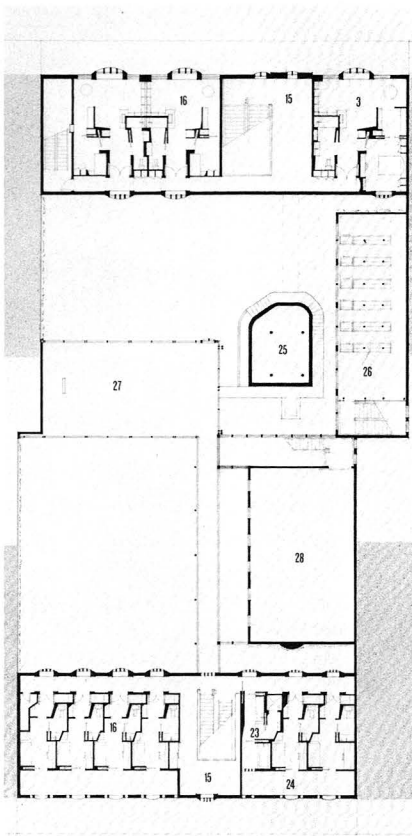
74th Street Elevation



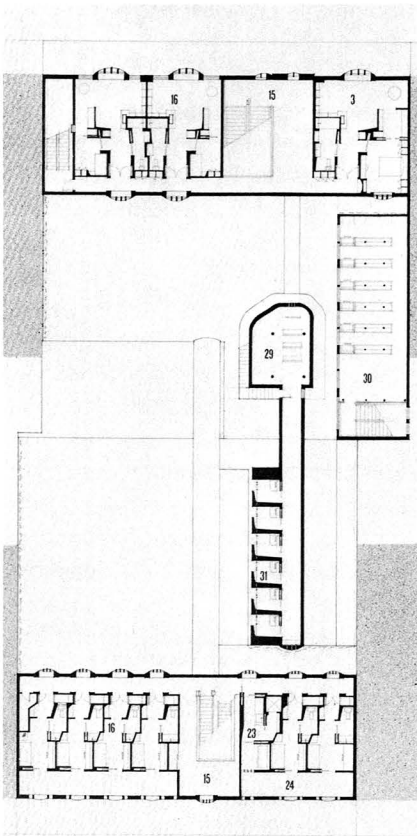
Ground Level Plan



First Level Plan



Second Level Plan



Third Level Plan